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ABSTRACT

This speech addresses the relation of effective discipline to the pursuit of academic excellence in schools. The proposed blend of specific strategies, methods, and ways of being conducive to excellence is characterized as "three dimensional discipline." This approach involves: (1) listening to what students are thinking and feeling; (2) clearly defining behavioral and academic expectations, with student involvement in the development of these expectations; (3) becoming proficient with the verbal and nonverbal nuances of communication to avert power struggles; (4) maintaining high expectations for all students and refusing to accept irresponsible behavior; (5) occasionally acting in a manner inconsistent with others' perceptions; (6) becoming familiar with research on classroom arrangement, learning styles, lesson pacing, and the various theories of discipline; (7) regarding discipline as problem prevention; and (8) providing instruction at a level where high success is attainable by each student. (TE)

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HIGH STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

A speech given by Dr. Allen Mendler at the annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in New Orleans, Louisiana, January 1985.

I want to talk today about teachers and students developing a partnership of excellence through high standards and effective discipline. Excellence means each person developing himself to a point beyond that which he pictures as realistic. It is the gifted student's accomplishing computer wizardry; the LD child's developing fluid reading skill; the behaviorally disordered child's decision to join his social milieu; the mentally retarded child's progressing in academic pursuits despite inherent limitations; the "average" child's discovery of unique and special talents; the educator's ability to be part expert, part child.

The pursuit of excellence flourishes in a climate which is demanding without being demeaning, structured without being rigid, participatory without being chaotic, honest without being phony, tough without being oppressive. It is an atmosphere which blends one's developing an identity, a feeling of connectedness to others, awareness of the importance of high achievement, and the sense of one's control over one's own destiny.

Let us not forget the importance of maintaining the virtue of human warmth in a highly technological society. Let us realize that student literacy develops with knowledgeable educators who are enthusiastic about their subject, authoritative without being dogmatic, inclined to share decision-making responsiblities with students, sensitive to the stresses precipitated by the appropriate demands for high achievement, and unyielding in their commitment to challenge their students as well as themselves. Much of my work during the last few years including the writing of two books, has committed itself to the training of teachers and principals in the nuances and subtleties of communication that provide for sound interpersonal relationships through shared limit setting, enhanced problem solving and successful conflict resolution. The blend of specific strategies, methods, and ways of being is referred to as "Three Dimensional Discipline." It moves away from the quick fixed variety of canned remedies for our educational ills that invariably produces one

EA 017 622

fad or another, because a panacea is not promised. A process for improvement is! And, my colleagues, need I say that with the gradual social erosion of respect for those in positions of authority, improving our stature in the eyes of the community and our students is a worthwhile goal.

To illustrate this erosion, a recent quote by John Mackavic in Sports Illustrated magazine is relevant. Mackavic, in describing the progression in the way coaches have had to address players over the years cites the following. A long time ago, says Mackavic, a coach would be able to tell a player, "Go over and stand in the corner!" More recently, he has had to say, "Please stand in the corner." Even more recently, it has been, "How about if you went over and stood in the corner?" More recently than that, it has been, "How about us talking about you standing in the corner?" And, finally, "Why don't I go over and stand in the corner for you?" The frustration of those in positions of authority when trying to get subordinates to comply with requests is amply illustrated by Mackavic's progression.

We have become inclined to utilize a variety of ineffective methods when dealing with noncompliant behavior out of frustration. It it common for educators to scold, lecture, take away privileges, send to the office, or otherwise isolate, demand public apologies, or spank. What must be remembered is that any method, no matter how successful in the short run, must preserve a student's sense of integrity and well being for it to be sensible in the long term. Any technique or method that is designed to humiliate ultimately generates resentment,rebellion, and retaliation.

We must realize that to promote excellence, we must have the integrity and forthrightness to model excellence. Not only does excellence mean new knowledge, cognitive expansion, high academic standards, and continued technology; not only does excellence require careful attention to consistency and the latest developments in one's field, it also requires an emphasis on creating a more caring, sensitive world. A world that provides a balance to the yuppie phenomenon of "me first" - a world in which solving interpersonal conflict is given the same attention as developing the later computer gadget. A world in which respect for another is as important as respect for the self.

In traveling around the country, the events that are generally referred to as disciplinary and which are popularized by the media are those which are the major discipline problem variety. Teachers being shot in the classroom, being physically assaulted, and being verbally abused are events that we all know occur too frequently. However, when educators are asked to define what exactly they mean by discipline, they are much more likely to refer to a minor variety of unruly behavior that is far less serious, but that makes one feel very frustrated due to the frequency of occurrence. Students expressing accusatory statements such as "You're unfair. I deserve a C not a D. You just don't like me, you don't give me enough help, etc."are likely to generate frustration and be returned with antagonism by the teacher. When students deny responsibility for their actions, when they generate excuses for noncompliance, when they use put downs directed towards other students or the teacher, and when they out and out refuse to do what is expected, the same kinds of frustrations and antagonisms ensue.

We must begin by recognizing that the children who misbehave repeatedly have developed misguided ways of seeking attention and having their goals met. They may be expressing resentment and anger indirectly or acting out somebody else's wishes. They may be exploiting weaknesses in the parental relationship or inconsistencies within the school policies. They may believe themselves to be unworthy of attention except when they misbehave. They often are feeling powerless and hoping to exert some influence. Some have identified with aggressive role models.

The goals of discipline are primarily to promote self-discipline and to teach people how to go about doing their own thing without infringing upon somebody else. Teaching that there is a cause and effect relationship between what a child does and what happens is desired.

Three dimensional discipline as a model provides opportunities for educators to learn how to prevent or minimize the likelihood of discipline problems occurring within their environment, what effective actions to take to stop misbehavior when it does occur without humiliating or locking into a power struggle, and learning methods and techniques for resolving problems with students who frequently misbehave.

In conducting hundreds of inservice training opportunities for educators throughout the country which addresses the issue of more effective discipline, I have found it helpful to emphasize specific techniques and methodologies which are grounded in sound theoretical formulations and empirical outcomes. Educators appreciate learning or being reminded that:

1. Their style of discipline is most effective when it is consistent with their basic underlying values and philosophies. That the distinctions between open versus closed, or strict versus permissive styles are irrelevant. What is relevant is the educator promoting a discipline policy which is most congruent with his/her basic orientation.

2. That kids have less need to misbehave in classes when they feel a connection to the teacher or others. There are many ways of building connections such as sharing a student's interests, requesting daily or weekly letters of feedback, administering interest inventories and reward questionnaires.

3. That many kids act up ~~or~~ to mask self-perceptions of inadequacy. That when students are helped to attribute success to their own efforts or ability and failure to lack of effort rather than inherent limitation, their motivation increases.

4. That eye contact, voice volume, proximity control, and nonverbal body language send strong messages which may either force or continue disruption or put an end to it. A recent study by Eleanor Grayson out of Hofstra University found that when prisoners who were incarcerated for assault viewed video tapes of people walking on the street and were asked to ~~weight~~ rate these people on a scale of mugability, the overwhelming number of convicts rated people who carried themselves in a nonconfident manner as being highly assailable. Irrevelant were demographic characteristics such as age, race, or size. Applied to a classroom setting, such a result would suggest that those teachers who carry themselves in a self-confident manner and who are not easily intimidated, are likely to have better success in managing difficult to reach students.

5. That the students themselves can become powerful allies in managing behavior when they are involved in the process of creating classroom rules and consequences.

6. That by calling on disruptive, poor learners more often, by being nearer to them, by giving them more wait time, and by providing more clues and hints when called on, their behavior will often improve.

7. That schools which do best have an active principal whose presence is felt and who sets the tone by having clear, consistent rules. It is a leader who is unafraid of being accountable to staff/students and who respectfully demands the same from them.

8. That consequences, when effectively implemented, can reduce the probability of power struggles which only make matters worse.

It is clear that educators must learn how to develop plans for discipline that are consistent with their own values and needs. They must be aware of the importance of knowing who their students are. They must recognize the role of stress ~~attention~~ in a highly demanding environment and to prepare themselves to implement stress-reducing methods. They must be well grounded and knowledgeable in knowing ways to increase a youngster's motivation. And finally, they must have a clear set of guidelines that define high school and classroom expectations.

In summary then, promoting high standards for effective discipline means:

1. *Listening to what students are thinking and feeling.*
2. *Clearly defining behavioral and academic expectations, and involving students in the development of such expectations as well.*
3. *Becoming proficient with both verbal and nonverbal nuances of communication that can be very helpful in sidestepping potential power struggles.*
4. *Have high expectations for all students and refuse to accept irresponsible behavior.*
5. *Occasionally allow yourself as an educator to act in ways that are inconsistent with the perceptions that others have.*
6. *Become familiar with research on classroom arrangement, learning styles, lesson pacing, and the various theories of discipline.*
7. *Think of discipline in terms of ways of preventing problems, actions to take to stop problems when they do occur, and future plans around resolving ongoing problems so that they are reduced in frequency.*
8. *Provide instruction at a level in which high success is attainable by each student in the classroom.*

In conclusion, let us realize that we will probably never fully eliminate discipline problems. We will probably never find the key that unlocks the door of providing appropriate expectations for every student. But, let us never stop trying.